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AUTHOR Richardson, Donald C.
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ABSTRACT

The cloze test has been used to measure reading comprehension, but it is equally appropriate for use as a teaching tool to improve comprehension skills. Teachers may adapt passages to specific students, purposes, content areas, vocabulary or concepts, as long as the words in the passage are part of the child's spoken vocabulary. The pattern of deletions used will tend to assist the pupil in acquiring specific comprehension skills. The "zip" procedure is one technique for introducing the cloze passage, in which the passage is transferred to an overhead projector transparency with the deleted words covered with masking tape. When the alternatives suggested by the pupils have been considered, the masking tape is "zipped" off the concealed word. Additional discussion should follow to permit students to indicate why they feel the words they provided may be better. Generally, the procedure will require practice sessions at least twice a week and should extend over one semester. Less frequent use appears to lack the impact needed for improving comprehension skills. (HTH)

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Donald C. Richardson

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Cloze Procedure

Definition

The cloze test works on the gestalt principle of closure which maintains that human behavior is motivated by the need for wholeness or completeness. Applied to the field of language arts, it would imply that pupils can accurately replace missing words by utilizing their knowledge of their language system. Generally, the structure of a sentence will provide the reader with clues to the missing word or word part. Thus, an understanding of both the syntactical and symatical elements of the language process assist the reader in replacing missing words. An underlying assumption of the cloze procedure is that if the reader can reconstruct the author's words, the reader has understood the author's meaning.

What Is It

The cloze is the process of systematically deleting words or portions of words from selected passages and replacing those deleted words with the underline of standard or consistent length. The deltions are filled in by the pupil using existing language and reading skills. Deletions may take several formats, depending upon the intent of the teacher.

The deltions may take the format of omitting words or word parts from spoken context. This type of cloze practice demands that the pupil utilize those language skills necessary to complete the speaker's thought. As pupils mature, the cloze practice gradually becomes more sophisticated with additional constraints being provided which encourage the pupil to utilize higher levels of language and reading related skills.

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At a kindergarten or first grade level, the teacher will expect the word(s) supplied by the pupil to conform to context clues and previously recorded information, as in the instance of language experience charts. This same level may demand the use of spoken context clues and either picture clues or the first letter of deleted words. As independent reading skills develop, the pupil is exposed to multiple choice selections in sentences containing known words. These drills are identified as maze drills and precede drills which expect children to independently write the deleted word using context, sematic and syntax clues.

Deletions may follow a very systematic predetermined pattern. This type of deletion is called an every nth word deletion. Using this procedure, the teacher deletes every 5th, 6th, 7th, . . . word. The deleted words are replaced with an underline of standard length. This is the standard format used to determine whether pupils can comprehend. The cloze test has been used most frequently to measure reading comprehension, but it is equally appropriate for use as a teaching tool.

The cloze, then, has two general uses: 1. a tool for measuring comprehension, and 2. a tool for teaching. As a testing tool, it is typically used to determine whether a given set of materials are at an appropriate comprehension level for a given student. As a teaching tool, it may be used to improve the comprehension skills of pupils. It is the purpose of this presentation to focus on the use of the cloze as a teaching tool to improve comprehension.

General Guidelines for Using the Cloze as a Teaching Tool

Sources of passages used for the teaching of the cloze are varied. Typically passages should be identified that have a high interest level

and are at the reading level of the pupil. One excellent source, which will be discussed later, are old basals. Their use will provide an immediate indication of reading level, and those "tried-and-true" stories that were of interest to pupils in the past will generally still provide a high level of motivation.

Teacher prepared materials are an excellent source. Passages may be written with specific purposes and students in mind. Teachers may wish to provide practice on specific semantic or syntatic skills. There may be a desire to relate the material to content area subjects to reinforce concepts or vocabulary.

Student written passages are also appropos. The passages are generally written with an unsophisticated vocabulary, and depending upon the purpose of the passage, will provide the student with additional understanding of the structure of the English language.

Regardless of the passage used, the teacher should check the content to make sure that the words contained in the passage are part of the child's spoken vocabulary. It is further recommended that the teacher determine if the content of the passage is within the realm of the child's experience. There is some evidence which would indicate that score variations are closely related to the topic of the passage.

When preparing to administer the cloze, the teacher should provide the child with some information about the topic of the passage and a general indication of the content. This is very comparable to the "setting the scene step" in the directed reading lesson.

Pupils should be encouraged to read the entire passage prepared for cloze instruction before filling in blanks. This will enhance the child's awareness that information contained in sentences which occur later in the paragraph hold vital clues to the entire meaning of the

passage. During early instructional stages, the teacher may wish to read the passage orally, then discuss word-by-word why certain words seem to be appropriate for a given blank and what clues contained in the passage helped the pupils decide upon that word.

As pupils develop independence in working through cloze passages individually, the teacher should plan to provide instructional time for class discussion of words that pupils used to fill in the blanks. All words that are semantically and syntactically correct must be accepted by the teacher, however, the pupils should be expected to substantiate their answers. This procedure will encourage interaction among the pupils, and futher develop an understanding of the structure of the language.

The pattern of deletions the teacher uses for instructional purposes will tend to assist the pupil in acquiring specific comprehension skills. When the teacher employs an every nth deletion, e.g., a systematic deletion of every 5th, 6th, 7th, . . . word, there is a tendency to enhance the pupils ability to comprehend details or relationships. When using an every 5th or 10th noun or verb deletion, there is a tendency to enhance the pupil's ability to understand the main idea or factual information. When only the initial consonants, vowels, blends, or digraphs appear and all other letters of the deleted word word are represented by the underline, or when only the above letters cited plus ending consonants, or when only the consonants appear in the deleted word, there is a tendency to enhance the semantic, syntactic and graphic skills of the pupil.

General Teaching Suggestions

If the pupils are accustomed to the use of word and phrase cards which accompany the basal series, these cards can be used very nicely for early cloze practice. The cards, which should contain only those words known to the child, can be used to form sentences with predetermined words omitted to implement intial cloze practice. A combined use of word cards and letter cards is also amenable to practice with the use of initial consonants plus context clues.

The "zip" procedure is a highly motivation technique to use for the introduction of the cloze passage. The cloze passage should be transfered to a transparency for use with an overhead projecter. Once the transparency has been prepared, selected words are marked off with masking tape. Pupils are encouraged to read the masked passaged in its entirety and fill in the blanks. Blanks are considered one at a time and in sequential order. Pupils are encouraged to discuss why they supplied given words and which clues contained in the passage helped them supply that word. When the alternatives suggested by the pupils have been considered, the masking tape is "zipped" from the concealed word. Additional discussion should follow to permit students to indicate why they feel the word(s) they provided might be better and to develop additional understandings of the English language.

As mentioned earlier, old text books are an excellent source of passages. Identify stories which have had great appeal to students who used them in the past. These old favorites should be removed from the basal with a razor blade. As noted earlier, there is some evidence which would indicate that score variations are more closely related to

topic than to vocabulary and sentence structure, and these old favorites can cover a broad range of reading intersts and reading ability. Once the stories have been removed, they should be permanently mounted in a file folder. To match reading interest and reading ability, the stories may be coded to indicate topic and reading level. After the stories are mounted in the folder, a felt tip pen is used to delte specific words for the cloze practice. For ease of grading, an answer sheet may be included with each folder. However, as noted earlier, discussion of responses should occur as frequently as possible.

Generally, the procedure will require practice sessions at least twice a week and the instruction should extend over at least one semester. A frequency of use less than this basic recommendation appears to lack the impact needed for improving the comprehension skills of pupils.

Suggested Sequence for Introduction and Utilization of the Cloze Procedure as a Teaching Tool

While many procedures used in teaching with the cloze closely parallel many teaching activities now used in the classroom, there are enough new variables that a level of readiness must be established prior to using the cloze as a teaching tool. The following sequence begins with procedures which may be used as early as kindergarten and has suggested readiness activities for more advanced levels. The suggestions are provided to assist the teacher and the pupil gain maximum benefits from the use of the cloze.

1. Use familiar rhymes, jingles, and stories read orally.

   Examples:

   a. Jack be nimble, Jack be _____.

   b. Jack and Jill went up the _____.

   c. The little train said, "I know I can, I know I _____."

2. The teacher presents oral context clues and the pupils respond orally to picture clues. Discussion follows.

   Examples:

   a. Please open the _____.

   b. Daddy drives nails with a _____.

   c. At the picnic we ate _____.

3. Use group experience charts initially written on the board and later transferred to ditto preferably using primary size type. After using the experience chart for several short teaching sessions, the passage is then mutilated. The teacher reads the mutilated passage orally and the pupils follow silently and supply the missing word. A brief discussion of the word(s) supplied follows.

   Examples:

   a. We went to the dairy on a big _____.

   b. We saw many _____.

4. The teacher presents oral context and has the pupil supply the missing word.

   Examples:

   a. Leaves grow on _____.

   b. There are always wheels on a _____.

   c. Jim went fishing with _____.

5. The teacher presents oral context and delimits possible answers by auditory clue. Pupils respond orally. Discussion follows.

   Examples:

   a. Bobby was riding his new birthday present. His birthday present begins like Bobby's name. Bobby was riding a new _____.

   b. Willy, a large dog, was pulling something that begins like Willy's name. Willy was pulling a _____.

6. The teacher presents oral context and delimits possible answers with a single letter. Pupil responds orally. Discussion follows.

   Examples:

   a. Jim rode down the trail on a _____.

   b. Jim looked at the bird and knew it was a _____.

7. The teacher presents a written sentence, containing known words, and has the pupil identify the correct word from several present. (I would suggest using either a Nifty Chart or a transparency for continued use.) Discussion follows.

   Examples: (Maze practice)

   a. They got the cat.
      hot
      not

   b. The cat book the food.
      took
      look

8. The teacher presents a written sentence, containing known words, and has the pupil identify the deleted word using the initial consonant. Discussion follows.

   Examples:

   a. Be a good b_____ while I'm gone.

   b. I'll have a s_____ for you when I come back.

9. The teacher presents a written sentence containing known words and has the pupil identify the deleted word using the initial and final consonant. Discussion follows.

   Examples:

   a. They s___t down to think.

   b. They g___t the cat.

10. The teacher presents a written sentence, containing known words, and has the pupil identify the deleted word using the consonants present. Discussion follows:

Examples:

a. The c _ _ was in the tree.

b. I w _ _ _ get the cat down.

11. The teacher presents a written sentence, containing known words, and has the pupil identify the deleted word using context clues. The word is the exact length of the deleted letters. Discussion follows.

Examples:

a. He can _ _ _ _ to the middle of the pond.

b. He will _ _ _ _ the kitten.

12. The teacher presents a longer written passage, containing known words, and has the pupils supply deleted words using context, semantics, and syntax. Words to fill deleted blanks are provided at the bottom. Discussion follows.

Example:

Billy Jones was a _____ who lived on a ranch. His father owned the _____. Billy and his _____ often rode up a mountain trail. The _____ up the trail was fun.

1. ranch
2. ride
3. boy
4. father

13. The teacher presents a longer written passage, containing known words, and has the pupil supply words using context, syntax, and semantics. Synonyms are accepted. Discussion follows.

Example:

If only his mother would let him keep the dog. Steve had _____ a dog of his own. Now he had _____ a dog and he wanted to keep him. If only his _____ would let him keep the dog. He would give the dog food and wash him.

SUGGESTED PROCEDURE FOR INTRODUCING THE CLOZE PROCEDURE

TO PUPILS ABOVE FIRST GRADE LEVEL

1. The teacher presents oral context with omitted words and asks the pupils to share their answers orally. Discussion follows.

2. The teacher presents oral context and asks the pupils to record their answers in written form. Discussion follows.

3. The teacher presents the context in written form. (I would suggest a Nifty chart or transparency for continued use.) The pupils respond to a maze format in written form. Discussion follows.

4. The teacher presents written context with deletions cited below. The sequence is arranged in order of difficulty.

   a. Delete selected nouns (verbs, adjectives, pronouns). Use a standard length underline for each word deleted.

   b. Delete the vowels from selected words. Use one underline for each omitted vowel.

   c. Deleted selected words and include only the initial consonant(s) of the omitted word. Use an underline of standard length following the initial consonant(s).

   d. Delete selected words from the passage and use one underline for each letter omitted in the deleted word.

5. The teacher presents written context with random deletions. The deleted words are listed at the bottom of the page and pupils supply words in written form. Discussion follows.

6. The teacher presents the context in written form which contains randomly deleted words. The pupils then respond to the deletions in written form. Let pupils discuss why they selected the words they supplied. Permit them to generalize about how various words can change the meaning of the passage.

7. The teacher presents written context with random deletions. Pupils respond to the deletions using context, syntax, and seminatics. Discussion follows.

Conclusion

The deletion of selected words from either oral or printed context would appear to be a viable instructional tool to improve the comprehension and language skills of pupils. Through the use of oral context, language experience charts, maze techniques, and random deletions from printed passages, pupils develop an awareness of the need for continuous use of context clues and how the structure of language provides valuable clues.

A cloze passage is easily constructed by the teacher and the passage may be taken from many sources. The passages may be written by either the teacher or pupils, or may be taken from any printed source which has a high interest appeal to pupils.

Its application as a procedure to increase comprehension skills in the field of reading are well founded. It demands that the pupil make maximum use of clues not only in one sentence, but that the pupil utilize clues contained in the entire passage. The type of deletion pattern used by the teacher will help the pupil acquire those skills needed to work with the main idea or details.

Its use is obviously not limited to the field of reading. The potential to help pupils understand the relationship of words, the structure in which words exist; to expand the vocabularies of pupils and to develop concepts are very practical and realistic applications. It is a unique approach to the teaching of many of the skills we want pupils to master. Too frequently we become locked into a routine very precisely outlined in the teacher's guides. The cloze procedure provides both the teacher and the pupil with a new and stimulating way to acquire and apply skills. The myriad uses of the cloze procedure coupled with the simplicity of construction makes it a very useful tool for each classroom.